

# Community ownership mechanisms and options for supporting its expansion



## The Challenge

Community ownership is high on the Scottish agenda, however no comprehensive study has focused specifically on barriers to community landownership. This research examined the effectiveness of community ownership mechanisms in Scotland. As many of the communities which have acquired land in Scotland have done so without legislation (e.g. the Community Right to Buy), there is a requirement to address challenges to legislative and non-legislative aspects of community acquisitions.

## Policy Implication

Future legislative change should align the requirements of different schemes. The 2016 Land Reform Act has revealed challenges specific to urban areas (e.g. defining communities) and combined with Public Asset Transfer has created new demands on existing funding, while increasing the demand for development long-term funding. The rights of compulsory purchase currently being legislated for (e.g. the right to buy neglected, abandoned land) may represent large shifts in routes to community ownership, but these may require time-consuming legal test-cases before they become established routes to ownership. Negotiated transfers remain the most used and preferred route to ownership; establishing a neutral service to support formal landowner-community interactions and negotiations offers potential for helping landowners and communities to achieve agreement.

## Research

The research had three stages:

1. Literature review, scoping interviews and the development of a database of community groups that own land in Scotland;
2. Stakeholder consultation processes including two community workshops and 70 interviews with professional intermediaries, non-community landowners, and interviews with a range of community groups involved currently or previously in attempts to acquire land
3. Analysis, synthesis and final reporting.

## Results

There are many barriers to community ownership, including recognising that community acquisitions are often reactive and ad-hoc. A more strategic and partnership based approach offers considerable potential for more effective wider community development. Funding to support acquisitions has improved in recent years and the number of smaller scale acquisitions have increased. A critical challenge is to find sufficient funding to support the longer term development of each asset. Both community and crofting right to buy remain difficult and uncertain routes to ownership, with a relatively low uptake and success rate.

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## About

The Land Economy, Environment and Society (LEES) Research Group is one of the largest groupings of economists and social scientists working in the rural, agricultural and land based sectors in the UK. Our vision is to be recognised as one of the leading centres for agricultural and wider rural economic and social research globally, benefiting the land use sector, the environment and rural communities.

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